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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR THINKS NIGERIA HAS HIT A CRUCIAL PERIOD

REF: LAGOS 2787

Classified by CDA Andrews for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: During an October 31 meeting with Polcouns and Poloff, Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi cited recent civil disturbances as very disquieting. In order to prevent further political turbulence, the Governors were assembling in Abuja that day to discuss means to cool down the internal security situation. As an outgrowth of that meeting, a smaller group of Governors would meet legislative leaders to massage differences and egos bruised by the electoral law controversy. He predicted greater PDP cohesion and a resumption of the convention schedule after a meeting of party leaders also slated later that day. While usually supportive of the President, Makarfi attributed much of the recent problems to Obasanjo's lack of domestic policy direction, an imperial leadership style that spurs Obasanjo to shun advice and crush dissent, and his surprising lassitude in bringing known instigators of unrest to book. End summary.

National Security

2. (C) The usually reserved and pro-Obasanjo Makarfi incisively criticized President Obasanjo for his frequent sallies into the arena of international diplomacy while paying inadequate attention to the brushfires in his own backyard. Obasanjo should stay home more, Makarfi bluntly declared. The Governor asserted Obasanjo was lethargic in moving to prevent simmering tensions from hitting the boiling point. The crux of Makarfi's complaint was Obasanjo's failure to aggressively prosecute known perpetrators of civil unrest. Immediately after the Kaduna disturbances in February 2000, Makarfi recalled that Obasanjo went to Kaduna to insist the State establish a Judicial Commission of Inquiry instead of immediately prosecuting suspects already under arrest. Obasanjo said that prosecuting people so quickly after the rioting would "overheat the political system." Makarfi said Obasanjo cajoled and arm-twisted the Council of State to follow his wishes. The Judicial Commission was established with the explicit promise that the Federal Government would toss the book at the culprits identified by the Commission. Although the Commission completed its report in September 2000, the President has failed to act on its findings, observed Makarfi. In fact, the only thing Obasanjo did with the report was to write notes in the margins and return it to Kaduna, shrugged Makarfi. This set a bad precedent, sending a message that people could bestir trouble with impunity, he commented.

3. (C) After 100 Hausa were killed in the OPC Ajegunle riot of October 2000 in Lagos, the FG seemed powerless to arrest Gani Adams, the OPC ringleader. (Comment: Adams finally was arrested this August, but was released October 31. Adams is a bogeyman for many Northerners, and his release will, at a minimum deepen their sense of alienation. See reftel. End comment.) During ethno-religious clashes which killed over 2300 in and around Jos in September, the President idled. No one was arrested. The Federal government merely set up a Commission of Inquiry weeks later. It took Obasanjo a week to visit the place, Makarfi complained. President Obasanjo erred in telling the press that the FG "knew" something would happen in Kano this October, yet took no action to preclude the violence. The President's remarks implied a dereliction of duty, Makarfi chided.

4. (C) Makarfi said the Government's ineptitude in dealing with these repeated crises created an atmosphere where "troublemakers" thrive. The recent Tiv-Jukun upheaval was particularly disturbing. He said Benue Governor Akume bore

some responsibility for the blow-up, adding that the governors were going to address this issue with Akume. While asserting that soldiers responsible for killing innocents must be punished, Makarfi nonetheless believed the military was compelled to send a strong deterrent message to those who would attack soldiers. The military had become the police force of last resort, Makarfi thought. "If people see the military as vulnerable, if militias think they can touch the military, the country could fall apart."

15. (C) Comment: Most Nigerians believe that the military had to send a clear message to the Tiv militia and others who might imitate them. Military bases have been traditional zones of refuge during bloody communal clashes. While there is a considerable debate over whether the military (or renegade elements of the military) went "too far" by killing over 200 in Benue recently, there is little dissent from the tenet that Nigeria's stability and integrity depend on strict maintenance of the taboo on attacking soldiers. End comment.)

Election "Reform"--Background

16. (C) The House and Senate have passed two competing bills--both with provisions that safeguard incumbency--which seek to restructure upcoming elections. Currently, local government elections are scheduled for April 13, 2002, followed by gubernatorial and presidential elections in 2003.

Both bills presume the Assembly has the constitutional authority to extend the tenure of local governments to 2003 and delay local elections to that date. The proposed legislation has created a political logjam. The Governors don't want local elections delayed. Delay would prevent them from strengthening their political base among local government area chairmen and councilors prior to the gubernatorial elections in 2003. Incumbent LGA chairmen, the National Assembly, and the President favor the changed LGA election date for their own parochial reasons.

17. (C) Makarfi lamented that the legislation pitted Governors against the National Assembly, the Executive and LGA chairmen. This controversy, coupled with the recent civil violence, created the appearance that the civilian government could not manage the affairs of state, he remarked. Makarfi feared the security situation and political logjams (including the internal PDP brouhaha) were being watched "closely" by elements in the military. Clearly worried, Makarfi commented that six of his gubernatorial colleagues had moved out of their official residences in anticipation of a deteriorating security environment. Since the President had not acted, Makarfi said all 36 governors were gathering in Abuja to hash out a compromise with the Assembly leadership on the electoral reform issue. Makarfi believed the gathering would also strike an informal agreement to eschew confrontational public statements that only roil the water and complicate resolution of delicate issues. Once the agreement had been reached on these issues, a smaller group of Governors and Assembly leaders would meet the President, Makarfi stated.

PDP Crisis

18. (C) Makarfi predicted progress in resolving the PDP leadership squabbles that threaten to scuttle the party's convention. A party official had obtained a court injunction to suspend ongoing Party congresses and the upcoming PDP National Convention. Despite the injunction, some states held their local government congresses on October 27, while others did not. This inconsistency only added to the air of confusion. (Comment: There is some speculation that Barnabas Gemade and Okwesilieze Nwodo, PDP Chairman and National Secretary, respectively, secretly instigated the suit for injunctive relief in order to forestall their probable ouster from party leadership at the upcoming National Convention. End Comment.)

19. (C) The Governor's prediction was partially correct. An "inner caucus" of Governors, the VP and the President met on October 31. That meeting produced agreement on lifting the injunction. Party congresses and the National Convention have been rescheduled. Presidential favorite, Works Minister Tony Anenih, who had been expelled from the party by Gemade for opposing the injunction, was also reinstated. However, the suddenly irascible Nwodo, who did not attend the October 31 "caucus," issued a public statement that the caucus was improper and its decisions were nullities. The party remains an untidy affair. State congresses were held the November 3-4 weekend. While most transpired without major problems, there were parallel congresses set up by rival party factions

in several states. In Enugu, a national assembly member was kidnapped. Moreover, there is still no sign that Gemade and Nwodo have accepted the decision of October 31. More intransigent statements attributed to Gemade appeared in major newspapers November 6. Thus, additional suits and injunctions are possible.

10. (C) Makarfi remarked that non-performing governors and those who face serious opposition for the PDP nomination were supporting Gemade in his bid to retain the Party Chairmanship. He said Gemade, a corrupt, ex-Abacha man, would attempt to guarantee those governors the PDP nomination in their states. Audu Ogbeh, according to Makarfi, would not intervene for any candidate but would be more concerned about the fairness of the process.

OBASANJO REFUSES TO LISTEN

11. (U) Makarfi believed the political situation would not have become so dense if Obasanjo would listen to objective advice. Instead Obasanjo allowed himself to be manipulated by an inner circle of advisors, some of whom do not have Obasanjo's best interests at heart. Vice President Atiku is Obasanjo's worst enemy, Makarfi claimed. Atiku persistently coaxes Obasanjo into standoffs with the party, the National Assembly and the Governors, asserted Makarfi. Atiku's wants the Presidency and his strategy is to weaken Obasanjo by estranging him from important constituencies. Makarfi remarked that Obasanjo plays the willing dupe in this game. He recalled that Obasanjo once relayed to Atiku a warning Makarfi had given the President about the Vice-President. Because Obasanjo betrayed his confidence that once, Makarfi swore he would not advise Obasanjo about Atiku's duplicity again.

12. (C) Comment: Clearly concerned that the ship of state had the appearance of being rudderless, Makarfi said a lot during the meeting. The different sessions between the Governors, National Assembly and President seemed to have reduced tensions for the time being. Whether this is permanent will become known soon enough. Makarfi placed responsibility for a large share of the current tumult at Obasanjo's feet. He believes Obasanjo will have to change his leadership style and pay more attention to domestic security matters if the spirit of compromise and dialogue engendered by the sessions of October 31 meeting is to stick.
Andrews